"You're planning to escape yourself!" His voice was an intense whisper, and he caught the work slave by the shoulder, turning his face to the light. "Jorith, take me with you!"

Slowly the Pavan nodded. "It's possible. I've been listening, for years, every scrap of information they let drop. The mountains are north of us. I've been trying to map waterholes, alternate routes. I always keep provisions hidden outside the camp, but not enough for two. I'd have to steal more food."

"You might get a few hours grace before they missed you," Kirk said. "But the warriors know I'm not allowed out of the tent unless Spock or Satak are with me, and--how could I leave at night, without waking Spock?"

"You'd really risk it?"

"Yes."

"Then don't worry about the master. Just don't make him suspicious by acting differently."

"I'll be careful," Kirk promised.

Three days later Jorith managed to snatch a few moments with Kirk. "Tonight," the Pavan said quietly. "Meet me by the well as soon as your master sleeps."

"But--"

"Put this in his wine before he retires." Jorith handed over a small bottle. "He will sleep deeply, and not be aware that you have left his bed. If the gods favor us, he will not awaken until late in the morning, then, of course, they will hunt us."

"It won't hurt him?"

"It's only a sleeping draught. I stole it from the healer. Come as soon as you can. I can't wait too long."

That evening Kirk found it difficult to conceal his impatience as he served and cleared away Spock's meal. The now customary discussion of his performance during the day's training had never seemed so long, but at last Spock indicated that he was ready to retire for the night. Kirk attended him in the bath, then as the Vulcan settled into bed, walked over to pour the small cup of wine he customarily drank before he slept.

For a moment Kirk hesitated, holding the tiny phial Jorith had given him. Then, determined that nothing he did would harm the Vulcan who had spared him, he uncorked it and tasted the liquid, relaxing when he recognized the taste of the sleeping draught he had been given. Satisfied, he poured it into the wine, thinking the stronger flavor of the wine would hide it completely. He handed the cup to Spock.

"Thank you, Jim," Spock sipped the wine slowly, showing no sign of suspicion. "And how is your reading progressing?"

"Quite well, I think, though Seren says I'll never lose my accent."

"Bring the book and let me hear you."

Kirk went to the small chest Spock used to hold his few clothes, and took out a carefully wrapped bundle. Seren, the elderly advisor who was teaching him to read Vulcan, was so pleased with his pupil's progress that he had even agreed to lend him some of his own precious books so that he might continue his studies in his free time. This volume, tales of some of the near legendary warriors of Vulcan's remote past, was Kirk's favorite. He found his place, returned to sit at Spock's bedside, and began to read.

The Vulcan listened attentively, occasionally correcting his pronunciation, but gradually his head drooped, and at last the empty goblet fell from his fingers. Kirk read on, his voice gradually fading, until he was sure that Spock was asleep, then, setting the book aside, he settled his master back against the pillows and drew the cover over him.

Quickly then he changed out of his flimsy silk tunic into the soft leather suit he wore for weapons practice. He had as yet no weapons of his own, and stole one of Spock's for his belt, then picked up the light bow and quiver the Vulcan had given him. He was ready to leave, anxious lest the Pavan panic and leave him behind, yet he found himself pausing beside the bed. He would never see Spock again.

"I wish it could have been different," he whispered. "I'd have liked you for a friend. But that's not allowed, is it?" He hesitated a moment longer, then touched the dark hair gently. Not allowed. He dimmed the light and left.

It was easy enough to evade the guards, who were set more out of custom than necessity. Only a fool would dream of attacking a camp of warriors, and the predators of the region had learned to stay well clear of camp fires. Jorith was waiting in the shadows by the well.

"Where now?"

"This way," the Pavan led him along a gulley that ran from the camp into the rocks, "first we must pick up the supplies."

Kirk followed Jorith, his eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the darkness. Although Vulcan had no moon, the brilliant stars lit their path with a frosty glitter that made walking safe.

At last the Pavan halted at a clump of bushes in front of a low cliff. "Through here," he whispered, and Kirk followed him into pitch blackness, stumbling for a few yards until Jorith pulled him to a halt. A spark glowed, caught, and a flaring torch illuminated the narrow tunnel in which they stood.

"The guards!" Kirk warned.

"Safe enough. We've come around a bend in the tunnel. Besides, we'll need the light. Come on."

The two continued along the tunnel, which gradually broadened into a high cave. Kirk caught his breath as the torchlight reflected off millions of tiny crystals embedded in the rocky walls.

"Pretty, hun?" Jorith wedged the torch in a crack in the floor. "No time to admire it, though, we've a long way to go before dawn. Here, help me move these rocks."

The supplies were well hidden, and Jorith had obviously planned his escape for some time. The